

N. W. Rankin = Dec '86

FIRST SERIES.

FRIENDLY WORDS

TO

EDUCATED NATIVES.

NO. 11

THE GOSPELS.

BY G. BOWEN, MISSIONARY.

BOMBAY.

TRACT AND BOOK SOCIETY.

1883.

Price 1 Pie.



Friendly Words to Educated Natives.



THE GOSPELS.

WE use the word educated because it is familiar, and, as commonly understood, designates the class that we are addressing in these papers. But strictly speaking, an educated person would not stand in need of any instruction or exhortation from us. His education is finished ; he has ceased to be a learner. Others should listen to him, not he to others. But this is not the sense in which the word is ordinarily used. By educated men we mean those who value education, who value all true knowledge and are very thankful for any addition or correction with which they may be favoured. We find that the men who have made the greatest acquisitions

2 *Friendly Words to Educated Natives.*

and who stand up head and shoulders above their fellows intellectually, are the very persons who are most solicitous to learn, and most on their guard against any thing which would tend to hinder the expansion of their sphere of knowledge. Jesus of Nazareth on a certain occasion said, in the hearing of men, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." By the wise and prudent, he means those who are puffed up with the idea of their own attainments and are unwilling to assume the position of learners. His disciples had not enjoyed the advantages that others had, and were conscious of their literary deficiencies, but they were eager to know the truth. Who are they in the India of the present day who are likely to be of most use to their fellowcountrymen and to elevate their country in the scale of national influence? Not those who have filled their minds with a great variety of knowledge obtain-

ed in the schools, but those who hunger and thirst after truth and are ready to give it a hearty reception whatever form it may come in, and however it may be opposed to their own prejudices. Multitudes go through our colleges without ever *learning how to learn*. To know how to learn means to know how to recognize truth and distinguish it from error even when the error is in our own heart, in a position of honour. Let this then be our conception of an educated man, that he is one who knows how to value education; who prizes nothing so much as the wisdom that cometh down from above, from the Fountain of life and light; who proves all things and holds fast that which is good, discarding the evil.

We invite attention to the Gospels and claim that what we learn from them regarding the parties who wrote them, constitutes a very strong evidence of the truth of the system that is set forth in them.

1. The first thing we notice is the *self forgetfulness* of the writers. They

4 *Friendly Words to Educated Natives.*

knew that they were writing for the church of all coming time, for they have much to say about what will be at the end of days, when Christ shall come again to judge the world. How natural would it be for them, if they were like other authors, to give some flattering information about themselves. They lose sight of themselves altogether, and never speak of themselves, except they have some mistake or folly or sin to confess. The reproofs addressed to them by Jesus go in without a word of palliation. They tell how they disputed which of them should be the greatest, notwithstanding the example of self-abnegation given them by Jesus. They tell about their indignation against some people in Samaria upon whom they wished to bring down the judgment of heaven, and how Jesus rebuked them saying, "Ye know not of what spirit you are. The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." They tell how John the beloved disciple, with his brother James, sought through

their mother to obtain an advantage over the other apostles, and get the highest appointments in the Messianic kingdom. They tell how slow they were to understand the nature of the work which Christ came into the world to accomplish. All four evangelists speak in detail of the great sin of Peter in denying Jesus, without a word of palliation. Yet at the time when the Gospels were written, Peter occupied a foremost position in the church. What was written was written evidently with his hearty approbation. But all the apostles brought upon themselves the reproof of the Master, because of their hardness of heart and slowness to believe after his resurrection. He had so often spoken to them of the ignominy that he was to undergo at Jerusalem, dying on the cross and rising after three days ; yet no impression had been made upon their minds by these prophecies, because they could not understand how or why Jesus, clothed with divine power, should suffer as a felon on the cross. Let

6 *Friendly Words to Educated Natives.*

any one go through the Gospels with the idea of noticing what the evangelists say about themselves, he will be surprised to see how seldom they refer to themselves at all and when they do how far they are from seeking to commend themselves to the reader. They have only one solicitude before them and that is to set forth Jesus.

2. But observe that even in what they report concerning Jesus they do not speak like partisans or like any other biographers, except it be those of the Old Testament. There is no declamation concerning Jesus ; no eulogy ; no endeavour to bring forward certain features, no attempt even to explain what might seem to some to demand explanation. Their one business is to give a faithful account of what Jesus said or did or suffered. Take up any modern book of biography and see how natural it always seems for the writer to lay special stress upon the things that most favourably exhibit the character of the subject and to palliate what men

would be disposed to object to. But in the Gospels there is nothing of this.

The criticisms and objections and accusations brought against the teachings and doings of Jesus, are stated in the language of the opposers. Their explanations of the miracles, their allegation that they were wrought with the co-operation of Satan ; their ungratified demand for a sign from heaven ; their assertion that according to the Scriptures no prophet would proceed from Nazareth ; their scandalous assertion that Jesus was a glutton and a wine-bibber ; their oft-repeated charge that he violated the Sabbath ; that he had never studied in the schools ; that he was a friend of publicans and sinners ; that he did not keep the fasts or teach his disciples to do so ; that he was nothing more than a common carpenter ; that he was guilty of blasphemy, and made himself equal with God ; that his only following was the uneducated rabble ; that he neglected the prescribed ablutions ; that he was going to destroy the temple ; that

he was stirring up the people against the rulers ; and that his teachings were unintelligible and preposterous, as when he said that men must eat his flesh and drink his blood ; that he was crazy and needed to be put under restraint by his friends, and that he bore record of himself, all these are stated with startling frankness. Here indeed is a long catalogue of charges brought against Jesus of Nazareth, by men in leading positions in the community, men regarded as the proper custodians of religion, whose function it was to decide what was to be believed and what was not. Along with some of these objections are recorded the answers given by Christ ; but very often they are simply stated without a word of comment, and the reader is left to decide for himself as to their validity. Now every body knows how strongly tempted an ordinary partisan is to show the absurdity of the objections advanced by enemies ; but there is not the slightest trace of this in the Gospels. Another thing that has very

often been dwelt upon by modern writers and which we only refer to, is the variety of statements when the different evangelists are treating of the same thing. Where one writer speaks of one blind man, another speaks of two; where one speaks of one demoniac, another speaks of two. If the apostles had been engaged in the work of palming off upon men a false history, they would have taken good care that no such seeming discrepancies should appear in the writings of the evangelists. There is not the slightest indication of a desire to make their several accounts appear consistent. Their one aim is to make a faithful report, assured that the truth will vindicate itself, and that wisdom is justified of her children, i. e. that they who are led by the Spirit of God will know how to find the truth in each and in all of these differing narratives. But the thing to be specially noticed is that the writers take not the slightest pains to make their narrative appear plausible and reliable. Almost the last

thing in one of the Gospels is the story set a-going in Jerusalem after Christ's resurrection, by the soldiers who had guarded his grave, as to the cause of the disappearance of the body. There it stands without even an exclamation point to indicate the absurdity of it. The writers knew perfectly well how the sceptically-inclined lay hold of every shadow of an argument that will tell in their favour, yet they have not the slightest hesitation in putting down such things, to go to every nation, tribe and tongue and be translated into all languages.

The only explanation of all this is their absolute confidence that the God of truth will be with the truth and cause it to accomplish that which he sees to be fit. Some of our modern critics will have it that the Gospel of Mark terminates at the 8th verse of the 16th chapter. In this case we have the unparalleled fact that a history of Jesus of Nazareth has been written by a disciple of his which carries forward the narrative to the moment

when the enemies of Christ had obtained a complete victory over him, crucifying him between thieves and allowing Joseph to bury his body ; and leaves the narrative there without any positive evidence that Jesus ever came out of the sepulchre. We believe the critics to be wrong, and that Mark did *not* terminate his Gospel without any notice of the risen Jesus. But at all events it is well worthy of notice that the first evangelists speak with such moderation of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. There is no vestige of any attempt to prove it, otherwise than by mentioning the appearance of the risen Saviour to his disciples.

We have read a great many books in many languages written in the design of overthrowing the authority of the Scriptures, but we have never found in any of these books the slightest trace of that strange simplicity, transparency, magnanimity or whatever it may be called, that influenced the writers of the Gospels, when they admitted into their narrative without

comment the objections of the enemies of Christ, not thinking it worth while to refute them but leaving the facts to take care of themselves, under the guardianship of the God of truth. How is it possible to doubt that these men were true men, honest men, and at the same time that they were well acquainted with the facts narrated by them? If these men had not been under the influence of the Spirit of truth, it would have been impossible for them to write as they did.



FIRST SERIES
FRIENDLY WORDS
TO -
EDUCATED NATIVES
BY
G. BOWEN, MISSIONARY.

- No. 1.—What is it to be a Christian ?
No. 2.—What is Saving Faith ?
No. 3.—Must we be baptized ?
No. 4.—Light brings responsibility.
No. 5.—Why did Jesus die ?
No. 6.—The Law of Progress.
No. 7.—Mission of Christ.
No. 8.—Miracles of Christ.
No. 9.—Christ's Unworldliness.
No. 10.—The faultlessness of Christ.
No. 11.—The Gospels.